DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 346 CE 080 396

TITLE	Libraries: Learning Places of Choice. The Response of the Library and Information Commission [to] "The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a New Britain." Policy Paper.
INSTITUTION	Library and Information Commission, London (England).
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	7p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.lic.gov.uk/publications/responses/learningage.pdf .
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Agency Role; Cooperative Planning; *Delivery Systems; Educational Cooperation; Educational Opportunities; Foreign Countries; Government Role; Independent Study; *Information Services; Librarians; Libraries; Library Associations; *Library Services; *Lifelong Learning; Policy Formation; Position Papers; Public Agencies; *Public Policy; Systems Approach; Technological Literacy; *User Needs (Information)
IDENTIFIERS	Learning Society; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The Library and Information Commission believes that libraries can make a unique contribution to making the vision of lifelong learning a reality in the United Kingdom. Libraries and information services are intimately related to learner needs and already serve as gateways to learning by providing learners with learning materials and personal support and by championing learners in developing individual competence. Libraries should be positioned at the heart of the learning age and supported by evidence-based approaches to show libraries as catalysts for learning. The commission is well placed to help the government develop the policies and programs required for the United Kingdom to play a leading role in the global information economy. The commission supports the following key themes from recent policy consultation papers: libraries must be seen more widely as part of the mosaic of local and national provision; public libraries complement formal educational provision by providing a resource base and a platform for people of all ages to participate in lifelong learning; public libraries have a key role to play in stimulating a personal thirst for learning and self-improvement and helping to create an informed and information technology-literate society; and libraries can play a major role in widening access to essential services. (MN)

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Library ..... and ..... Information Commission

Policy Paper

ED 452 346

The Learning Age: A Renaissance for a new Britain:

The Response of the Library and Information Commission

LIBRARIES: LEARNING PLACES OF CHOICE

The Library and Information Commission applauds the Government's intent to prioritise lifelong learning. Fostering the habit of learning is essential if we are to continue to prosper economically, combat social exclusion and enhance people's quality of life.

But many people find the maze of learning opportunities a huge barrier. They will need advice on what is available, initial help in using it, training in the use of information and communications technology and support in developing their personal information handling skills.

Nearly 60% of the population hold public library cards, and libraries are already the learning places of choice for many people. Uniquely placed to help, libraries are the single most important means of delivering the Government's educational plans that fall outside the classroom.

However, the current split of Government responsibilities for libraries and education poses the risk of wasteful duplication of effort. "Joined-up thinking" through integration of policy and objectives throughout Government is essential if we are to deliver lifelong learning services effectively.

Specifically established to provide a single, coherent and efficient source of advice to Government in this field, the Library and Information Commission will do all it can to develop this relationship between the education and library sectors and to ensure input into relevant social and economic policies. Our response to *The Learning Age* explains in detail the unique contribution that libraries can make to lifelong learning, and sets out the problems that need to be overcome if we are to turn vision into reality.

"Libraries - the Life Force for Learning"

CE 080 396

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What is Lifelong Learning?

Lifelong Learning:

- focuses on the individual (not educational institutions)
- is continuous: different types of learning are required at different times of life and for different reasons
- is inclusive: learning activities include formal and non-formal, programmed and non-programmed, education, training, learning and self development
- covers all modes of learning for learners of all ages and abilities (including school age)
- enhances the quality of life, personal growth and creativity
- reaches from the individual to their families, communities and organisations
- takes place within a context of rapid and continual change and recognises the importance to the individual of personal change
- contributes to education, social, economic and cultural health and the future development of the UK
- aids employability and training, life skills and competences, formal education and qualifications
- requires "joined-up thinking", through:
    - integration of policy and objectives throughout Government
    - a pervasive learning culture in all organisations at all levels
    - the union of economic and education interests

Learners and Learning Opportunities

Learners, particularly but not just the less sophisticated, find the learning maze of opportunities a huge barrier. The learning maze needs:

- to be converted from a barrier to an opportunity through developing a learning spiral which helps individual learners:
    - gain awareness and understanding of what is available
    - develop confidence and motivation
    - acquire skills fundamental to learning, e.g. information handling skills
    - harness skills for personal growth and development
- to provide an effective gateway to learn through an infrastructure of advice, information and guidance
- to harness and co-ordinate the good work which already exists, i.e. to foster good practice
- flexible, accessible and affordable learning opportunities to meet diverse learning needs
- to develop the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- to resolve funding issues
- to quality assess (kitemark) learning provision and measure success in terms of benefits
- to encourage partnerships amongst stakeholders, whether this is provider/learner, learner/learner, employer/provider, providers/provider

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The role of Library and Information Services in the learning process

Libraries and information services of all kinds are catalysts for learning. They are intimately related to learner needs and already offer quality **learning places** in their many different environments through providing:

- gateways: via **connectivity** and access to information, advice, guidance and quality assurance
- opportunity: via **content** and its availability, sustainability, fitness for purpose, quality and range
- capacity: via personal support, championing learners in developing individual **competence**

Libraries and information services:

- are the learning places of choice for many people
- are places where knowledge occurs
- place the learner at the centre within their traditional role in underpinning learning
- are inclusive and familiar: public libraries are open to all
- offer an accessible, neutral learning space where people feel secure within a shared value system
- provide a socially inclusive cultural and creative environment
- engender a sense of community for their users
- are networked to other learning centres and work with other agencies, at local, national and regional levels including those serving the business community
- are recognised as having a commonality of purpose, wherever they are located
- reach into people's lives in many ways; people use a range of libraries and information services throughout their lives and often for different purposes at any one point in their lives
- are visible flagships for learning

Libraries and information services:

- are managed strategically, locally and co-operatively
- offer a range of dynamic, renewable resources, both print and other media
- are relevant to their community of users, anticipating and meeting user needs
- select, collect and preserve resources, offering a seal of quality and kitemarking
- are organised for access and use
- add value to the learning process by packaging and mediation
- offer the creation of new learner-centred resources

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Librarians and information specialists:

- have always been part of the learning culture as:
    - partners in learning, understanding the learning process and recognising achievement
    - information managers
    - information handlers and brokers
    - subject experts
    - researchers
    - carers for users needs
- have generic skills as:
    - educators
    - gatekeepers
    - advisers
    - explorers
    - organisers and engineers
    - analysts and assessors
- in the context of lifelong learning, have skills as:
    - mentors
    - mediators
    - suppliers
    - guides and navigators
    - tutors
    - promoters and educators

The Way Ahead (By 2002)

As a matter of urgency:

- the learning age must be linked to the information age to facilitate competitiveness, social inclusion, regeneration, for the UK to play a leading role in the global information economy.
- UK wide, coherent, durable models must be created to cover:
    - new policy - to achieve synergy
    - new institutional/infrastructural/professional models - to achieve delivery
    - new funding models - to achieve equity, accountability and measurement of value and benefit
- Libraries should be positioned at the heart of the learning age supported by evidence-based approaches to show libraries as catalysts for learning:
    - integrating existing initiatives from various library and information sectors
    - funding pilots to produce new evidence on libraries as learning centres
    - finding, appraising, disseminating and building on lessons of good practice
    - promoting a new professionalism within library and information services

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The Library and Information Commission:

- is well placed to help Government in implementing the above.
- can co-ordinate the policy framework as part of its Memorandum of Understanding remit
- will promote new professionalism/infrastructure/institutional models: cross-sectoral co-ordination is part of its core mission
- has good contacts throughout the UK and Europe
- will help measure benefits and outcomes through its research strategy which focuses on research to demonstrate benefits as well as outcomes
- will facilitate an evidence-based approach through gathering, assessing and promoting best practice as well as pump priming initiatives/pilots using UK funding, as well as funding from non-traditional sources

The Library and Information Commission was established as the national focus of expertise to Government on all issues relating to library and information issues. Its core objectives are:

- to provide a single, coherent and efficient source of advice to Government on all issues in the field
- to draw the Government's attention to emerging issues and to suggest appropriate responses to them
- to provide all advice on the basis of as full a process of consultation within the library and information community as necessary and as time allows.

The Commission's value proposition is a firm belief in the added value of library and information services to society for which a holistic, i.e. a cross-sectoral, approach is essential. It represents a wide range of expertise from commercial, education and government sectors, as well as the library and information sectors. A strategic priority for the Commission is to ensure that the role of library and information services is seen as central to learning for life. In the past year, we have made significant contributions to policy development in this area:

- the Commission's 2020 Vision
- *New Library: the People's Network*
- research on the cross-sectoral role of libraries in learning commissioned from CEDAR (Centre for Educational Development Assessment and Research)
- a major conference on Libraries in Learning Communities with the University of Sunderland

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In addition, the Library and Information Commission has responded to the following consultation papers:

- Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (the Dearing Report)
- *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* (Kennedy Report)
- *Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, First Report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (Fryer Report)
- *Connecting the Learning Society: National Grid for Learning:*
- *Learning and Working Together for the Future*
- *University for Industry Pathfinder Prospectus*
- *Our Information Age*.

The Library and Information Commission supports the key themes of these consultation papers and their acknowledgement of libraries:

- *The public library service holds an enormous range of educational material and has the potential to deliver information and learning to people of all ages and backgrounds, right across the country* (The Learning Age)

- *Libraries need to be seen more widely as part of the mosaic of both local and national provision, offering additional arenas through which the culture of lifelong learning for all can be fostered and sustained... We envisage that libraries will make a significant contribution to the construction and maintenance of a learning culture for all* (Learning for the Twenty-First Century)

- *We intend that libraries, with their vast stores of information and accessibility to the public, will be an integral part of the Grid. In this way, the Grid will make available to all learners, the riches of the world's intellectual, cultural and scientific heritage* (Connecting the Learning Society)

- *Public libraries provide a largely free means of accessing, harnessing, sharing and developing knowledge. They complement formal educational provision by providing a resource base and a platform for people of all ages to participate in lifelong learning* (Connecting the Learning Society)

- *Public libraries have a key role to play in stimulating a personal thirst for learning and self-improvement and help to create an informed and IT literate society* (Connecting the Learning Society)

- *Libraries also have a major role to play in widening access to essential services (for those who could not otherwise afford them)* (Our Information Age)

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